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# A ROYAL PAIN

LAST SUMMER THE SAUDI ROYAL

family threw a little party in Wash-

ington. To set the mood, the royals

filled DC's convention center with

tons of white and yellow sand. Then

they hired artists to create replicas of

a Saudi village, complete with whitewashed turrets and arches, and a bedouin encampment of black camel-hair tents trimmed in gold. The 450 exclusively invited guests—among them Vice President Dan Quayle, Speaker of the House Tom Foley, “shadow” Senator Jesse Jackson, Secretary of Commerce Robert Mosbacher, and CIA director William Webster—wandered among sweeping sand dunes, exotic dancers, and a make-believe mosque. It was one of the prestige events of Washington's social season.

The Saudis were no doubt pleased, for they'd thrown what amounted to an expensive and overly hyped coming-out party. The affair's ostensible purpose was to launch a multi-million-dollar traveling cultural exhibition, *Saudi Arabia: Yesterday and Today*, but its true aim was to show carefully selected parts of Saudi Arabia to Americans who'd become suspicious of the reclusive kingdom.

At the center of the party, the huge gold and silver doors of the Holy Mosque of Mecca—the most glorious relics of Saudi Arabia's past—towered over the most glamorous symbol of its present: handsome, urbane Prince Bandar bin Sultan, the kingdom's ambassador to the United States. The prince, who's King Fahd's nephew, smiled and nodded to the men and charmed

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the women, demonstrating his graceful mastery of small talk, the currency of Washington social events.

Journalists and politicians love Bandar. He's well educated, well tailored, and well spoken, and he presents himself and his nation as eminently reasonable; he appears on "Nightline," for example, to discuss ways to maintain stability in the Middle East, he finds \$1 million to contribute to Nancy Reagan's "Just Say No" antidrug campaign, and he funnels millions of dollars to the contras. In his nine years in the United States, he's done a lot to change the image of Saudi Arabia, which was once known almost exclusively as the near-medieval nation that orchestrated the painful oil embargo of 1973. Some of his greatest accomplishments have come in the past six months, as he became a symbol of Saudi Arabia's newfound friendship with the United States.

But Bandar puts a benign face on a somewhat sinister place. Now that America has risked the lives of hundreds of thousands of young men and women to protect the 4,000 members of the Saudi royal family, it would be appropriate to examine the lifestyles of some of Bandar's American-based relatives, particularly those who are given to more traditional Saudi ways of relaxing and doing business.

After examining the antics of this cream of Saudi society, one might conclude that Bandar is actually a man who's out of step with his countrymen—a Saudi who's slightly ahead of his time. Say, about a hundred years.

Last November a senior State Department official "urgently requested" in "the strongest terms," in a communiqué that was leaked to London's *Daily Telegraph*, that King Fahd throw a net over his royal relatives in the

United States. Their obnoxious behavior, the State Department official said, "posed the risk of alienating American public opinion."

The request was made at about the same time that Prince Turki bin Abdul Aziz al-Saud, the king's younger brother (and fourth in line to the Saudi throne), was making headlines in Boston. He drove his stretch limo over freshly seeded public playing fields, for one thing, and his bodyguards allegedly assaulted two editors of the *Harvard Crimson* because they'd written editorials that the prince objected to. All that was bad enough, but what really alienated Bostonians was the royal bodyguards' habit of throwing local children out of Danehy Park whenever Prince Turki's kids wanted to play there. You see, they don't play with common children.

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Vice Mayor Kenneth Reeves held a press conference at which he accused Bostonians of whining and of something quite sinister. "I have learned there's a bias in this culture against the extraordinarily rich," he said.

Of course, the city had good reason to defend the extraordinarily rich Prince Turki: he was about to give \$1 million to Harvard Medical School, which would use the money to endow a professorship in immunology.

Turki, who ostensibly served as Saudi Arabia's vice minister of defense, had come to America with Bandar to lead the fight to win AWACS aircraft for his country. He was supposed to aid and abet Bandar's lobbying, but instead he headed directly for Miami, where thoughts of the turmoil in the Middle East apparently drifted out of his mind. He concentrated on building his real estate portfolio; he bought millions of dollars' worth of condos and soon-to-be candy-colored mansions.

Of course, Turki occasionally made time to have a little fun. Throughout the Greed Decade, he and his entourage papered Miami with bad checks; they stuffed hotels, restaurants, boutiques, and even novelty shops that sold inflatable party dolls. To keep the riffraff at arm's length, Turki hired 300 off-duty Dade County policemen to moonlight as his security force. The officers who weren't on his payroll complained that the cops-for-hire allowed the prince great latitude to pursue his favorite avocations: speeding and punching traffic cops.

Slavery was outlawed in Saudi Arabia in 1962 (although the Asians and Africans who work in the country might dispute the fact), but Turki apparently never read the emancipation proclamation. In 1982 police stormed his mansion after they received reports that the family had "enslaved" and beaten its servants. It was quite a scene: Turki's rent-a-cops beat up the city's real cops, and Turki's wife bit a policewoman on the arm.

But Miami's finest could only take so much, and Turki eventually landed in jail. Washington came to his rescue, however; the State Department gave diplomatic immunity to the prince and his hangers-on, thus infuriating a slew of Florida officials.

As punishment, King Fahd shifted his brother from the defense ministry to the education ministry. Saudi Arabia could use good, strong ministers of education—half of its men are illiterate, and it doesn't even keep statistics on women—but Turki didn't seize the opportunity. Instead, he quickly returned to his old ways.

In the spring of 1990, for example, he traveled to Orlando to address an international conference on education in developing nations. When he and his retainers checked into the Hyatt Grand Cypress Hotel, they were apparently gripped by *nostalgie de la boue*. A suit that the hotel filed in Orange County's circuit court alleges that during their monthlong stay the royals destroyed almost an entire floor of the luxurious hotel, then left without paying their bill. According to the lawsuit, they smashed windows and patio doors, damaged a piano, put claw marks on walls and doors, and left a patio ankle-deep in dog doo. Incredibly, two weeks into the melee a royal representative had negotiated the cost of the damages down to \$20,809 and persuaded the hotel to extend Turki's stay.

In August, the prince's ill-defined duties brought him to Boston's Charles Hotel, where he rented 40 suites. Perhaps sobered by Iraq's invasion of Kuwait, he ordered more than a half-dozen crates of Cheez Doodles, according to a hotel employee, and monitored events in the Mideast via his portable television satellite dish. To his credit, he donated \$30,000 to the police union's fund for disabled children and three computers to a local school. "I am not the playboy," he maintained. "Really."

WHILE TURKI WAS MAKING HIS MARK IN MIAMI, HIS BROTHER-IN-LAW, Prince Mohammad al-Fassi, was gaining equal fame in Hollywood. Fassi, for those who don't recognize his name, is the fellow who bought a mansion on Sunset Boulevard (one of four he's purchased) and painted the nude statues on the property pink and black, thus helpfully highlighting their genitalia for passersby. He also

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bought the dress in the store in the city and converted it into a suit for him.

The relationship between the Ibrahims and Hadid erupted into a messy lawsuit last winter. The Ibrahims want Hadid to resign as the managing partner of the Ritz-Carltons in Washington and New York and of one that was rising in Aspen until construction was suspended a month ago. They also think he's gouging them: their suit accuses Hadid, whose fee is based on a percentage of the Aspen project's development costs, of "intentionally or negligently" bloating the budget from \$70 million to more than \$150 million. They also accuse Hadid of misappropriating and mismanaging funds and of holding business records hostage.

THEN THERE'S PRINCE MISHAL, WHOSE sole claim to fame is that he stands 11th in line for the throne. In the late 1970s he tried to get kickbacks on the gravy train, but he found the tracks blocked by Ashland Oil, which refused to pay the hundreds of thousands of dollars he demanded. Mishal invoked an unpleasant but by no means uncommon Saudi custom of throwing uncooperative American businessmen in jail. (Really uncooperative businessmen are tortured by the Saudi secret police.) A recent NBC News documentary cited 35 to 40 such incidents, including one in which an American engineer was arrested and severely beaten for several months because he allegedly circulated videotapes of "The Love Boat" television show among his fellow Americans in their private compound. The State Department never intervenes in such cases; it doesn't want to offend the Saudis.

In court transcripts, Orin Atkins, Ashland's CEO at the time, told IRS agents that Mishal forcibly detained some of Ashland's employees. "Almost any Saudi can harass you if he has the position that says you owe him money," Atkins said. "One of our men who doesn't scare very easily got so he didn't want to go to Saudi Arabia. In Saudi Arabia, if you think it's hard to get in, wait until you try to get out."

Are you listening, President Bush?

Mishal was another prince who thought he'd have better luck in America, so he said that he was going to open a public relations firm in New York. He prepared a brochure that listed his many contacts among world leaders, including George Bush and Idi Amin, who's still believed to be a guest of the Saudis

and who not long ago told a 960 interview: "There are still people who should be hacked into pieces, the pieces stewed and eaten. But I am a busy man here in Saudi Arabia, too busy to do it."

Despite his many friends in high places, Mishal's dream died at his extravagant let's-get-acquainted party in 1988. As chronicled in a weekly called *Neurotica*, which bills itself as "The Only Tabloid of New York Nightlife," the party started well enough. Among the lavish hors d'oeuvres was a dish that consisted of tiny chick-peas that had been individually stuffed with caviar—at a cost of \$8 per pea. Also on the menu was a big ice cream cake that was topped with a map of the Middle East made of colored frosting. Saudi Arabia was a pale-green, lime-flavored island of calm, while bomb bursts made of chocolate chips and maraschino cherries marred the frosting of the surrounding, less-stable Arab countries. Encircling the cake were Ken dolls that carried briefcases and gazed—enviously, one presumes—at the green patch of frosting.

In the main, the partygoers were reporters in search of free food and other members of the demimonde. They were happy as long as the food and drink lasted, but when it ran out, something odd—or, to be precise, odder—happened: Mishal's bouncers demanded money from the guests. There had been a mistake, the bouncers explained; there was supposed to have been a cash bar, not free drinks. The guests didn't choose to ante up, however, and the photographs of the last few minutes of the party look like one of Weegee's more lurid crime scenes.

Mishal's friends packed up the PR tent and returned to Riyadh, chastened but, one hopes, wiser men.

PRINCE FAISAL MOHAMED AL-SAUD AL-Kabir, a general in Saudi Arabia's army, learned of Iraq's invasion of Kuwait while he was relaxing in one of his mansions in Atlanta. Saddam Hussein's decision to invade surprised Prince Faisal. But Hussein had been massing his troops for weeks; shouldn't a general in the Saudi army have been paying closer attention?

Maybe Prince Faisal was distracted because he had other problems. His real estate investment company was coming apart at the seams, and his creditors were after his assets, among them his million-dollar

collection of wristwatches.

Faisal had come to Georgia 15 years before, to receive military training, and he couldn't bring himself to leave. "He loved the South, with its rivers and swamps and all of the colored flowers in bloom," his architect, Thaddeus Jannoski, told the *Atlanta Constitution*. "He was tired of the desert."

Faisal bought two Tara-type mansions, a condo, and riverside land on which he built a 50,000-square-foot dream palace with a botanical garden on the fourth floor. Atlantans were fond of him and his kindnesses; he'd walk into department stores and buy a dress for every woman in sight, for instance, and he'd throw fish fries and invite hundreds of locals.

Paying for this generosity was another matter, however. Faisal waited until the last minute to pay his bills, or he ignored them completely. His company, Yamanah Limited, always seemed to be teetering on the edge of bankruptcy, and on November 1, 1990 it filed for Chapter 11; it owed \$21.2 million to 43 creditors, among them American Express, several hotels and casinos, and a gunsmith. Faisal's creditors are now clamoring for his \$43 million in assets, which include a Rolls-Royce, an Aston Martin, the mansions, a huge antique gun collection, and his beloved watches.

"He doesn't want to liquidate," a creditor told the *Atlanta Business Chronicle*. "It's the Saudi mentality. He believes every tomorrow will bring a solution to his problems."

No one has seen the general since August, not even his local lawyer and business agent. That's understandable, perhaps, since his nation was under siege.

But Faisal didn't go home. He went to Switzerland, the *Business Chronicle* learned. He was last seen trying to cut a deal to become a gold broker for some wealthy Indonesians.

OVER THE PAST FIVE YEARS AMERICAN alliances in the Middle East—at various times Iraq, Iran, Jordan, and Syria have been our allies—have shifted as often as the sands. Our relationship with Saudi Arabia has been a consistent thread in a tangled tapestry. Since the relationship has all but turned into a marriage, maybe it's time to ask the State Department to draw up a prenuptial agreement: In case of divorce, King Fahd gets custody of all the royal rude boys.